

## Some American Plays

LONGER PLAYS BY MODERN AUTHORS—Edited by Helen Louise Cohen. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

THE plays are "Beau Brummell," "The Copperhead," "Dulcy" and "The Intimate Strangers." The book includes an introduction on the American drama and a separate introduction on each play, and concludes with a selected bibliography for students of the American stage. The individual introductions, chiefly biographical and circumstantial, are better than the general survey. But this is ground perhaps too well worked over to cover with any semblance of freshness in so encyclopedic a fashion. Here little is done beyond indicating and classifying tendencies. It runs comprehensively over a wide area and hits the high spots. That the stretch, though wide, is barren until lately is sufficiently shown by a quotation from Laurence Hutton in 1891 praising extravagantly that claptrap mediocrity "Davy Crockett."

It is unfortunate that the title does not indicate that this is an all American volume. We have far too few such well printed and attractively issued American plays. Even now it is a thin gamble to publish them unless they can be put out under the protection of the student market. But the appearance in print from time to time of the American playwright is an encouraging sign of a slow glacierlike movement which one despaired of twenty years ago. It will be a more encouraging sign when one may read oftener a hitherto unproduced American play. If the native playwright could rely on a reading public he would be enabled to write better plays; if the native producer could be assured of a sufficient reading demand for good plays he might venture to produce more. Until this occurs he is quite justified in thinking that a public unable to make a book pay is unlikely to guarantee a return on his

very considerable investment. But we read too sluggishly to care to give the visualizing cooperation necessary to enjoyable play reading, and the publisher knows that as a general thing the few people who read plays read only those they have seen, where their memory may work pleasantly while their mind sleeps. Also he knows that unless a play stands a fair chance of production it will not pay to publish it. A vicious circle; and yet as one here refreshes his recollection of the twenty year period which these plays cover, he sees an improvement. Perhaps if one lives to see it there may be more.

But the present American playwright will not be able to hold out until it comes. A rereading of Clyde Fitch's first play, "Beau Brummell"—still fluttering freshly, though its extinct soliloquy pronounces it "a dodo bird"—confirms the impression of what the theater lost, not in his early death, for he had been writing most profitably for twenty years, but in the fact that he was never allowed to write as well as he could. "I have had to please stars and managers in all my plays," he told me once. "I have never felt sure enough of my public to write the play I wanted to write." He had just proclaimed his emancipation when he died. Had he lived he would doubtless have found that he had proclaimed it too soon.

Here are three successful contemporary plays to place against the Fitch "Beau Brummell" period. What would they have been then? "Secret Service," "The Gilded Fool," "Arizona"? What would they have thus, that even the theatrical sun do move. Characterization is less staid, sentiment less saccharine, social observation more salient and charm more real. Had Fitch only been allowed to devote his technical dexterity to something more substantial we should have enduring monuments now to place beside Pinero.

ALGERNON TASSIN.

## The Unwilling Philanthropists

Continued from Page Three.

frank. All you've got to do at Cammelsville is to occur, and they'll nail you for the Pole.

"Now I don't give a hoot for Arctic exploration. The only arctic I know anything about are the kind you wear in hard winters. Crazy galoots and such like who go putting themselves on ice, it may be for years and it may be forever, in attempts to prove the exactly true North Pole never has been reached in spite of all contrarywise assertions and proofs, have no charms for me. Anyway, if in this advanced age they haven't sense enough to hop into an airplane and light on the North Pole from overhead, I'm not saying nothing. But when I tried to tell all or some of that to three bearded huskies who held me up and fined or assessed me for Pole money at Cammelsville I got nothing but derisive laughter in way of reply and the longest bearded of the three, raising his whiskers so's I could peek below them and see he wore neither collar nor tie, remarked:

"Uncle, I'm the Sitting Road Magistrate of Cammelsville. I am now in session. Beware of contempt of court, sir; beware of contempt. I beg to inform you that the sum in which you are assessed, namely, \$25, will be handed promptly to our Arctic Exploration Fund, one of the noblest objects ever presented to the public. The Pole for Cammelsville is our motto; and never was Cammelsville known to turn back when she once got agoing—Jeemini! As for the fact—and it is a fact—that you are violatin' the anti-automobile law, into that I cannot go, not being disposed to argufy a self-starter, as you might call it, or a self evident proposition, as we judges and lawyers calls it. Twenty-five dollars. Come boss-so boss! sa! sa!"

"Twenty-five dollars, eh? And the alternative?" I demanded.

"You'll have to go to a drug store for that," he assured me gravely; "and there ain't one within five good mile. So never mind it for the present—you can worry along, I guess—jest keep yer hand on yer stummick to kind o' warm it. And fork over twenty-five little Buckin Bronchoes, or —"

"Or WHAT?" I roared, white with just rage. "That's what I was asking you about, Bone Head."

"I don't think I ever was really as mad in all my life before or since as I was just then. It was awful. . . .

"Or," he stated, perfectly cool, 'as the Sitting Road Magistrate I shall have to put you to work for twenty-five days and nights, excepting your sleepin' time, and an eat now and then, extracting the cobblestones out of Logan's Lane over yander and making it fit for the new style traffic. You cull out the cobblestones one by one, understand? In fact, they are handpicked. No machinery allowed, for fear it may spoil the shape of the stones.'

"Did I pay up? Well, you see the ticket. That's my receipt. I'm a polar bear, I am."

"And then what?" I asked as the amateur chauffeur paused to allow some accumulated indignation to evaporate.

"Then what? Then I turned around and druv home," he said.

"The placards took me through the traffic holdups going back, for they apply to traffic both ways. . . . Say," added the amateur chauffeur, brightening up, "you don't happen to be thinkin' of travelin' over that route, do you?"

"No," I said. "Why?"

"Well, I was just thinking I might fix up a deal with you. I can let you have them placards if you can get them off with hot water—and I guess you can—and you can paste them on your machine before starting out. I'll let you have them for just twelve and a half apiece—just half what they cost me—and you'll be that much ahead of the game, besides not having to waste your time stopping to talk to the gazaboos."

It was a tempting offer; so I told him I would think about it.

"You'll have to think quick, friend," cried the amateur chauffeur. "If you don't take them I'm going to scrape them off, pronto. They're no more use to me—never again will I go over that route—and I'm sick of the sight of them."

"Cheer up. You are a regular philanthropist," I consoled. . . .

"An auto-philanthropist," he improved. "Sure, Mike, I am that. And it's further proof of my generous nature when I offer all right and title to them passports for 50 per cent. cash."

I didn't close the deal; but unless the amateur chauffeur carried out his threat and washed off the stickers his offer still holds good.

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